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Pitt ~ Can a True Christian Minister Exact Tithes? ~ 1874

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Can a TRUE CHRISTIAN MINISTER Exact TITHES?

OR,

REASONS FOR NOT PAYING Tithes.

By GEORGE PITT.

MANCHESTER:
WILLIAM IRWIN, CATHEDRAL CHAMBERS,
HALF STREET.

1874.

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PREFACE.

On the 4th inst., (September, 1874,) a distraint was levied on me for the sum of Five Shillings, said to be due for **Rectorial Tithes,** on some Cottage Property owned by me in Carshalton, Surrey.

The Broker who seized, would seem to be wiser in his day and generation than the children of Light, and more merciful than his Masters, as he managed to arrange his visit about dinner time, when he might spare himself the inconvenience of carrying away Chairs or Tables, Fenders or Fire Irons; and also spare me the extra sacrifice which would arise from the forced Sale of Lumber Furniture; so he found some silver spoons on the table, and took them to the weight of 4½ oz. nearly, avoirdupois, which might be replaced for about 25/- to 30/-, to satisfy the claim of the Reverend (?) authorities for **5/- Tithes.**

Some time ago, a notice was forwarded to me, stating that 3s. 4d. was due for **One Year's Tithes,** which I promptly and respectfully answered, to the effect, that I had no desire to evade paying the trifling sum of 3s. 4d. a year; but that I had sincere conscientious scruples against paying Tithes at all, as I saw they were contrary to Christ's positive commands, and Scripture **New** Testament authority; indeed my peace was concerned in it, and I felt if I paid Tithes, I should offend God. I therefore hoped my scruples of conscience

might be regarded, by excusing me; the more so, as I was probably the **only one** in the Parish who objected to pay them on religious grounds; and as the sum was so paltry, it could hardly be felt out of the clerical abundance.

In reply, I received a note **insisting on the payment,** which I again answered by saying, that **I really could not pay them voluntarily,** choosing rather to lay in prison for life than do so: and to enforce them would savour of persecution, as, to get 3s. 4d., they would take goods worth six or ten times the amount, which the result proves.

To ordinary minds it would seem an act of gracious condescension in a wealthy Gospel Minister to have remitted, on the appeal of a parishioner pleading conscientious scruples, the sum of 3s. 4d. a year; but his peremptory refusal seems to infer, it is a matter of conscience on both sides. I therefore propose examining what Scripture, or other grounds there may be, for the exaction of Tithes by Christian Ministers; or whether an ordinary person, who loves and believes in his Bible, has sufficient grounds to refuse paying Tithes; and publishing the same for the sake of my Tenants and Neighbours, who, knowing I have suffered thus for my religious scruples, may be able to judge for themselves, whether I am sincere in refusing; or whether in so doing I have acted without Scripture authority, or in a spirit of narrow-minded bigotry.

This I will endeavour to do, as simply and briefly as I can.

GEORGE PITT,
Berkeley Cottage,
Mitcham,
Surrey.

9th mo. 9th, 1874.

CAN A TRUE CHRISTIAN MINISTER EXACT TITHES?

In endeavouring to arrive at a right conclusion, and a just answer to my Title Query, several matters will need investigation, such as, **What are Tithes?—How did they arise?—What are the commands of Christ, and the teaching of the NEW Testament about them?—What was the practice of Christ and his personal Followers while on earth?—What the custom of the Early Christian Churches about them?—How?—When?—and by whom were they introduced into the Christian Church?—established in England?—and tolerated by Law?** After this, a few words by way of examining whether Tithes are fair, or justifiable, on natural or human grounds, and a short summary of the whole will conclude.

Tithes, or Tithing, we learn from Scripture, began amongst the Jews in the time of Moses, and meant that the tenth part in Israel was to be given to the **Levites**, as an inheritance, for their common services in the Tabernacle, (Mark! **Not for Preaching!**)

as **also,** for the Strangers, the Fatherless, and the Widows.

The **Ministers,** or "**Priests,**" of which God chose Aaron, and his sons, and their posterity—and none other under penalty of death—were **not to take any Tithes of the people;** but the Levites were out of their Tithe to give the Ministers or Priests a tenth portion, besides sundry first fruits, according to their devotion.

In all this there was no Law to compel them to pay Tithes—if they refused, the Jews were not visited by the Brokers to exact them—they only incurred the odium of disobeying God's orders.

Thus **originated Tithes,** as a command, and formed the foundation, either by precept or example, for all others, in after ages.

Leaving these Mosaical Tithes for the present, I will turn to the **NEW** dispensation. By **Tithes** in the present day, I take it to be understood, "A settled maintenance for the pay and support of Christian Ministers sanctioned by Law" is meant.

As our query concerns **Christian Ministers,** the thoughts spontaneously turn to the Author and Founder of the Christian Religion, and instinctively we **first** enquire, Did **He** ordain them? Did **He** command them?

England is almost entirely a professing Christian country:—the great majority will say, **they are Christians**! by which I take them to mean that they believe in, and are followers of **Jesus Christ**, who came from, and was **sent** of God, and appeared in bodily form on earth, some 1800 years ago: and that the written Gospel testimonies about his advent, his doings and sayings, with a few additional Letters or Epistles, chiefly written by his then immediate Apostles, together called the **New Testament**, form the basis of all **Doctrine** and **Practices** for Christ's followers, in all ages, and contain all necessary **Canon Law**, by which **Christians** are to be bound and governed. Any attempt to alter, add to, or take from these Holy Scriptures, is denounced with a curse, by their own authority, which as believers in Christ, we admit is **Divine** authority: and Christians are not expected to observe, or be bound by any **Law**, command, or Doctrine, differing in character, or not found in these Scripture Canons.

This is a position, I believe, commonly accepted throughout Christendom; and if so by the common people, how much more so by **Christian Ministers.**

Let us enquire then, What did **Christ** say about the payment of Ministers? Had he any? Did he give any instructions or commands to, or about them? Were the instructions clear, and definite, so as to preclude the necessity of studying Greek or Hebrew to

understand them? Christ preached himself—what was his custom for himself? because these things are of the first importance.

Yes, Jesus Christ did give commands to his Ministers! He spoke so plain as to leave no doubt on the subject. His words were very positive and clear. He chose a number of disciples to be **Ministers,** and ordained them to preach the Gospel; they were not College men, nor did he give, or promise them worldly riches; but go,—**preach**;—take only one suit of clothes; no money or scrip: **FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE!!!**

And that they might not be dismayed at the poor prospect, he continued—"The labourer is worthy of his hire," subjoining the practical interpretation of the character of the **hire,** viz., Eat such things as are set before you, but go not from house to house.

Well, these Ministers went and preached according to their Master's orders, and on returning, seemed well satisfied with the arrangement, for they exultingly exclaimed, Even the very Devils were subject to us! And their Master, as if to establish and confirm the instructions he had given them, asked them, When I sent you without money, or scrip, **Lacked ye anything?** And they answered, **Nothing.**

This does not look like **exacting Tithes.** Either

we ought to find a passage equally strong and clear, to authorize the forced pay of Ministers, or we ought to admit that this clear and forcible command is an unalterable **Canon Law.**

Not knowing any such passage myself, I say,
No real Christian Minister can exact Tithes!

But what was Christ's own practice and custom? We know, after the Spirit descended on Him, he was continually teaching and preaching. Did he **exact Tithes**? Did he take any pay?

Quite the contrary. Born in a stable; wearing one garment without a seam; houseless; homeless;—Not so well off as the birds, and the foxes, who had nests or holes—**He** had not where to lay his head.

Asked by the Civil Government for Tribute Money, neither he, nor his disciples, had as much as one piece of silver among them, and he had to work a miracle to produce it. Such was the life, example, and practice of Christ, whom Christians profess to believe in and follow,—whom Gospel Ministers profess to expound, though for so doing they demand their **Tithes,** of from £300 to £3000 a year, and call in the arm of the law to exact them with five-fold force, if a stray sheep dares to murmur a Christian scruple against paying!

But let us suppose the heavenly influence attending

the Great Head and Founder of the Church was a sufficient power to animate, and compensate his disciples, while he was with them bodily, how was it **after** he left them?

Well, we find Peter—the ignorant, poor, impetuous fisherman—preaching so effectually, that he converted three thousands in one day; and yet it seems he had **No Tithes,** for on seeing the poor lame cripple beggar, he exclaimed, "**Silver and Gold have I none!**"

And yet these Poor Disciples and their Converts, were so loving and hearty, that many sold their possessions **voluntarily,** and brought them into the poor church, and they had all things in common.

Peter's severe rebuke to Ananias.—"Before thou sold thy possessions, were they not thine own? and after they were sold, were they not in thine own power?" did not look much like Tithes.

Then **Paul,** the great Gentile Epistle Writer,—mighty gatherer of the churches—a high-bred, learned Gentleman—extensive traveller in the ministry, but who confessed he did not preach in words of man's wisdom, Did he **exact Tithes**? Did he receive pay for his remarkable ministry, and oversight of the Churches?

No! he worked at his trade of a tent-maker with his own hands, that he might not be chargeable on his

converts, or flock, much less on those who were not; and tells them, that they, like him so labouring, ought to support the weak.

The present exaction of Tithes by professed Gospel Ministers, appears to me an exact **reversal** of all that the founders of Christianity taught, either by precept or example, for the first 300 years. We may read of weekly or monthly offerings, but they were not for the pay of Ministers preaching the gospel, but for the weak, the widows and fatherless, and were in all cases **Voluntary Contributions.**

Having thus examined the early history of the Christian Church, and shown, I hope clearly, no such thing as Tithes existed—and that the New Testament Scriptures are not silent on the subject, but emphatically protest against them, or against the principle of a forced pay for preaching the Gospel—I will now return to the Mosaical law of Tithes, because those who have not been enlightened on the subject, and Ministers who have an interest at stake, might think and argue, that Tithes are of course right, and Divine, being so plainly commanded in the Bible. This can only occur, however, from misapprehending the difference between the Law and the Gospel. The Law was to the Jews only; the Gospel to Jews and **Gentiles,** the world over, in all ages. The Gospel was to supersede, supplant, and abrogate the Law, especially the ceremonial Law, of which Tithes were

a part. The Law was but types and shadows of better things to come—a Schoolmaster to lead to Christ, who is the better way, the substance, and reality. To say that the Jewish Law is still in force, and binding on Christians, is to say, that Jesus Christ has not come in the flesh. The Law settled that the Priesthood was to belong to Aaron, of the tribe of Levi only. Jesus Christ, the founder of the Gospel, was not of the tribe of Levi, but of the tribe of Judah, as predicted; and after he was offered up a sacrifice without spot to God, his Apostles and Ministers testified an **end** was put to the ordinances of the former priesthood, and witnessed against the temple wherein the Priests ministered; for which Stephen was stoned to death; and they preached up Christ Jesus, the New and Living Way, which was not made manifest while the first Tabernacle was standing.

For any Christian to view it thus, (which I do,) he cannot pay Tithes, because he would be submitting to Jewish bondage—the Law of Tithing being part of a Ceremonial Law, and yoke of bondage, which was laid on Israel after the flesh; and we are now commanded to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free; and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

After Christ, we are no longer under the Law, or Schoolmaster, but Faith is come. If any advocate that Tithes under the Jewish Law, are binding on Christians under the Gospel, they must of necessity bring in Jewish

Ceremonies, an Altar and Sacrifices;—for Tithes were not to be given to the Levites till they were offered an "Heave-offering" unto the Lord.

The Jews themselves, did not regard Tithes as a Moral Law, for since the destruction of their Temple, they have **No Tithes,** having no Levites *to whom*,—no Temple *where*, to pay them;—no Altar *on which* to hallow them. That Christians should take them up, when Jews have laid them down, is passing strange,—an absurdity, and a scandal. Do I hear any one saying Christ encouraged Tithes by telling the Scribes and Pharisees they did well in paying Tithe of Mint, Anise, and Cummin? Well, I admit it, but it was to the Jews only he then spoke, in the time when the Levitical Priesthood was not ended, who were bound by the Law, so long as it was in force, till Christ was offered up, and said, **It is finished.**

If any one still imagines that the Mosaical Law of Tithes is binding on Christians, I would like to know on what ground, or authority? When and where was the transfer made, and the fact recorded? In the absense of these data, I boldly say, **there is no Divine authority to justify Christians in paying Tithes**—and that men were never compelled to the payment of them in the **Old** Testament, nor did ever practice them in the **New.**

I will now pass on to another branch of my

examination, viz., How? When? and by whom? were Tithes introduced into the Christian Church—established in England, and tolerated by Law.

I have already traced them down to 300 years after the Christian era, when no such thing as Tithes was known. By that time, however, lukewarmness in some measure had crept in: when Egyptian and Heathen converts, fallen from their first love, were hankering for Priests and Altars; and when the Bishops began to fatten from the gifts brought in, they commenced advocating the policy and expediency of adopting a slight **imitation of the Mosaical Tithing,** and appealed to the Church to give their tenths; but they craftily concealed their motives of enriching the Ministry, by urging them as an increased bounty to the Poor.

These appeals of the Bishops and Ministers were pretty liberally responded to, but in all cases they were **free offerings,** both as to kind and quantity, and **no force** was used to obtain them. For 800 years there was no Ordination by the Church, as to the quantity that should be given. In the first eight General Councils, which extended to the first thousand years, not so much as the **Name of Tithes** appears. It was not till the year 1215, when the **Pope's authority** had grown powerful, and the Papal Canons, which previously had little force, were now getting received into practice, that any Law, Canon, or Constitution of any General Council, was formed for **Commanding the payment of Tithes,**

nor expressly supposed them **a Duty of Common Right**: nor indeed until the year 1560, was there any penalty openly attached to the non-payment of Tithes, when at the Council of Trent, under Pope Pius the 4th, Christians were commanded to pay them, under **penalty of excommunication.**

As to the Christian Church in England, about the year 600, Pope Gregory 1st sent Augustine, a Monk, into England, who converted the King of Kent, and he and his followers converted other Kings, till Christianity extended greatly in the nation, and they *began* by imitating the primitive Apostles in all things, so as not to make Religion burdensome.

But after a while they began to preach up the old Roman doctrine, that Tithes ought to be paid; and teaching the people that the Pardon of Sin might be merited by good works, and the Torments of Hell avoided by their **Charitable Deeds**, they easily persuaded the ignorant people, not only to pay Tithes, but also to give their Lands, until the Religious Houses got possession of nearly one-third of the Whole Land; and had not the Law of Mortmain been passed to prevent it, the greater part of the Nation had been in their hands.

As to the Laws or Canons for the English Christians, the first seems to be in 786, when Pope Adrian sent from Rome two Legates with a decree that the people of Mercland and Northumberland should pay Tithes.

Other Laws followed, but till about the year 1200, every one gave their Tithes at their pleasure, when Pope Innocent the 3rd sent a decree to the Bishop of Canterbury, commanding him to enjoin every man to pay his temporal goods to those that ministered Spiritual things to them, which was enforced by ecclesiastical censures, and was the first beginning of general Parochial payment of Tithes in England.

The Bishops and Priests, on whose behalf this decree was made, were not slow to act on it, and to take away the right and liberty of the people to give their Tithes to those who best deserved them, and to greatly corrupt the Clergy, so that it roused the famous reformer Wicliffe, bitterly to complain to the Parliament of Richard the 2nd, of their Heresy, Gluttony, Greediness, and Debauchery.

The Pope having thus established the payment of Tithes, made a pretended Title by prescription, and set up courts to recover them, called Ecclesiastical Courts, where **his** Creatures were judges. Little mercy might the Poor expect from them, yet excommunication was the extent of punishment they could inflict on defaulters. Having settled the payment of Tithes, and set up a New Hierarchy, after the pattern of the Jewish **Priesthood,** the Pope took upon himself to be successor to the **Jewish High Priest,** and claimed **Tenths** from all his inferior Priests, by Divine right, and ultimately **first fruits** also, though the English long resisted it.

Having claimed the **first fruits** and **tenths,** as annexed to his chair, and to be the successor to the Jewish High Priest, and Head of the Church, he continued to collect them till King Henry the 8th, displeased and discontented with the Pope, because he would not grant him a divorce from his Queen, to marry his Maid of Honour, Anne Boleyn, renounced the Pope's supremacy, (though himself a **Papist,**) and assumed it himself; and by Act of Parliament, which he awed into submission, got **first fruits** and **tenths** annexed to his Crown, as Head of the Church, and dissolved the Abbeys, Monasteries, and Religious Houses, applying the proceeds to his own or state purposes; and hence Commenced the Reformation—not until then were Tithes called a **civil right.**

Mark the injustice!—in the time of Papal sway, Parliaments who had been vehement in declaring Tenths and first fruits a damnable custom, now made it a foundation stone to support the New-made Head.

This Law of Henry the 8th, with additions by his son Edward 6th and the Long Parliament, and a Law in 1836 to commute Tithes, which though it modified Tithes and restrained the excesses adopted in exacting them, still left the root of the evil intact,—are the substance of our English Laws concerning Tithes.

By all this we learn that Tithes were instituted amongst Christians by the Popes. Now the Church of England

was established and patronized by the State as a **Reformed Church,** to protest against Popish errors, consequently called Protestant, and a Law was smuggled in, to allow, yea more, to **compel,** the payment of a rich fixed maintenance to Church of England ministers, as **protesters** against Papacy, whilst practising their chiefest error. Whether this be right or just before God, let honest men judge. I would here ask, Were my spoons taken by Divine Right? or by Human Right? If by Divine Right, where is the authority and precedent? If by Human Right, I have shown the unfair and miserable grounds for such an unjust Law, which is a disgrace to our Statute Book. And Christian Ministers in the 19th century can be found to say in effect,—it's the Law! it's my right! and I will have it, or know the reason why." Like Shakespeare's Merchant, they will have their pound of flesh.

I have given my reasons for non-compliance, and believe I have stated facts; if not, I am open to conviction. Do I then contemn Civil Laws, and bring them into contempt? By no means! I respect and obey the Laws, and willingly suffer for any breach of them, though ignorantly committed. Laws "are for the punishment of evildoers, and the praise of them that do well." Laws are, or should be, made on a Divine pattern of justice and fairness, all round. All Laws are not so made, and as men become more enlightened, they find it their business and duty to alter, repeal, and re-make bad and unjust Laws.

I say that the Law sanctioning Tithes is a **bad** Law, and like the abolished Church Rate, cannot long survive. The light of reason is revealing its iniquity and injustice, and the more foolish Ministers can be found to exact Tithes, the sooner will its days be numbered. It must be palpably obvious to any reflecting mind, that no Civil power has any right, business, or authority, to interfere between a Man and his Soul, between Conscience and its Maker, in things Divine or Spiritual. How can that injunction be fulfilled, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," if the Law destroys his liberty? "To his own Master he stands or falls." Any Civil Law, which endeavours to make men worship in any particular way, or endeavours to make them Religious by Act of Parliament, exceeds its office, and oversteps its prerogative.

As one man cannot save another, so neither must one man, or any set of men, howsoever pious, force his or their opinions upon him. God gives every man a **free will.** By what right does Man, whose breath is in his nostrils, force his Brother Man to act in Divine things contrary to his **free will and conscience?** We are told to give to God the things that are God's, and to Cæsar, the things that are his; therefore I say, a Minister who **exacts** Tithes, takes the wages of unrighteousness;—and the Law that supports his injustice, is an abomination.

A Church of England Minister may plead, "I devote

my time to preaching the Gospel, and religious duties: my Church is open to all, including yourself. Am I not to live as well as you? If you will not come, the Poor may, and how otherwise than by imposing a Tax, can I be remunerated?—for the Poor ought to have the Gospel preached to them."

I answer, If thou art a **true Minister** of Christ, follow His instructions, and thou hast His promise that thou shalt not want. The righteous are not to beg bread. I dare not come to thy place of worship, nor hear thee, because thine is a Hireling Ministry;—thou preachest for hire, contrary to the Letter and Spirit of the Gospel, which says, "Freely ye have received, **freely give.**" A thing wrong in principle, can not be right in practice. But the fact is, thou hast not **received freely.** Thou hast been to College, at an expense of time and money, to learn Greek and Hebrew, so as to better understand what Christ spoke, and the Apostles preached; whereas the Greeks and Hebrews who heard them speak in their own language could not understand them, for it seemed foolishness unto them. We read of one Simon Magus, who would have bought the gift of God for money—so would many professed Christian Ministers: they would buy the wisdom of preaching, for money, at the Colleges, not from love to God or the Heathen, but to retail it at an enhanced rate. The old complaint that Preachers preached for hire, and the people loved to have it so, seems doubly applicable at the present time; but by so

doing, it is plainly ignoring or denying the commands of the New Testament, and making a Trade in the Church and Divine things, and we know our Saviour whipped the Buyers and Sellers out of the temple, remarking, his house was not for merchandise. Besides how unfair! how unjust! to exact payment for a thing not delivered,—common honesty in the world condemns it. A shopkeeper will not charge me for an article I have not selected, or received. But a Minister of the Gospel, (so-called,) insists on my paying for his Ministry which I have never heard, nor chosen,—and worst of all, exacts payment to support and maintain a thing which my conscience tells me is wrong, and contrary to the Truth.

Is this a Christian Spirit? Is it not a glaring persecution, which God will judge?

When the **true** prophet of God healed Naaman, he would take no pay, but Gehazi his servant, who had no hand in the cure, took wages; which seems a parallel case.

It is fashionable to be called a Christian now-a-days; and while wealth and fashion are so rampant, I have an apprehension, that from many motives, the Churches, so called, will command abundant votaries and attenders, who out of their fatness will freely support their Ministers, without prosecuting Dissenters for 3/4 a year.

As to preaching the Gospel to the Poor, when Bibles

are to be bought for 6d., there is not much fear of the People perishing for want of the outward knowledge of the Gospel;—and the poor, are not always the Lord's poor. His poor are the humble in heart, and poor in spirit, whatever their outward position. Christ's love to the World, for whom he Died, is not abated; neither is his Spirit withdrawn, nor his power diminished, that he will not, or cannot, send forth and fit Ministers for his service, without needing Universities to instruct, or Magistrates to provide maintenance for those he sends forth.

When the Law gave State patronage to the Protestant, or National Church, at the Reformation, there were few if any other Christian Sects existing, which gave more colour to maintaining them; but now that other Christian Sects have arisen to the number of 300 or 400, all disowning Popery, and believing in Christ and the New Testament, until the Dissenters now balance, if not exceed, the State Church in numbers; it seems a piece of brazen assumption for Ministers, or the Law to say, we have a special right to convert people to our way of thinking, and be paid for it per force, though there are hundreds of other Christian Sects. I say this is a piece of impudence, which will not much longer be tolerated—the more especially as this church itself is split up into two great divisions (besides subdivisions): one half of them feeling their deadness so strong, that they have introduced the gaudy formalisms of Popery called Ritualism, which, in reality, contain the errors and corruptions of Popery

without their sincerity to redeem it, and yet are paid for **protesting** against Popery. It becomes any fraction of this National Church, therefore, to be modest, and not assume "rights," which are hundreds of times less right than at first.

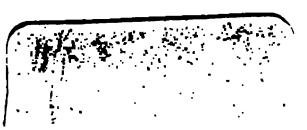
As a last resource, will any try to persuade me, that as we are all erring and imperfect, it would exhibit a better Christian Spirit had I paid the 3/4 for Peace Sake? That would be to sacrifice Principle to Policy; to please Man rather than God; to deny the Faith given me in the light of Christ; to barter my Birthright for a mess of pottage. I had gladly done so, could I have retained my peace. Whether the sum is 3/4 or £34, the Principle is the same!

Daniel might easily have bowed to the Golden Image, and kept his place and reputation. His Friends might have tried to coax him, that it would only cost a little time, and less trouble to perform; but he dared not, and continued to worship God in his own way, though almost one alone among the Jews who could venture to do so. No more dare I, bow to the Golden Image of an Hireling Ministry, and exaction of tithes, though I stand alone among thousands.

My task is done. I have examined the Nature, Origin, and History of Tithes; endeavoured to show they were intended for he **Jews only**, while in Canaan, and

not for Christians—especially Gentile Christians out of Judea; that there is no Divine authority binding on Christians for paying them, but forcible protests against them. I have also shown that they were impiously introduced amongst Christians, by the Popes and Roman Catholics,—and from greedy motives retained, and copied by the Protestants,—who shamefully usurp their tolerated legal power to fetter the consciences of, and to domineer over, Dissenters; which **must be Reformed**:—meanwhile I assert, from divine authority, **no True Christian Minister can exact Tithes!**

WILLIAM IRWIN, Printer, Cathedral Chambers, Half Street, Manchester.



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